

## Fort Shafter: Scholars in Khaki

Richard A. Greer

A generation has passed since the events of December 7, 1941 catapulted an outraged United States into World War II. As that great struggle unfolded, we told our boys in uniform—and each other—that the memory of their sacrifices could never fade, that the imperishable gratitude of a nation would forever sanctify their deeds, their lives, their deaths. Anxious millions followed the course of hostilities as we overcame the grim reverses of early 1942 and trudged along the road to victory.

It was a road carefully—if sometimes belatedly—described by military historians, mindful of the need to capture at the scene if possible the records of battles destined, unbelievably, to lose their awful immediacy, their flesh and blood, to sink into the background of the vague past—in a word, to become neither more nor less than “history”.

And now—so soon, really—that is what we have. We are reminded that today more than half of our people can share no intimate knowledge of the great crusade which ended on September 2, 1945; they were not yet born. Well, up there on the shelves are the books, fat or thin, that tell how men fought at Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Angaur, Iwo Jima, Okinawa—hallowed names all, and seared into the soul of many a middle-aged American.

It seemed an eon then, but things actually went so fast. Could anyone hope to keep up with them? Some tried, almost from the start of war. In the Pacific, Richard Tregaskis wrote his famous *Guadalcanal Diary* for the International News Service. S. L. A. Marshall, first Army historian in the Central Pacific, produced *Island Victory*. And at military units here and there, “many and varied undertakings in historical writing” were in progress. So many, in fact, that on August 3, 1943, the War Department set up a coordinating agency—the Historical Branch, G-2, in the Military Intelligence Division.

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Its ambitious mission: to plan and supervise the compilation of the war's history, at least from the Army's viewpoint. There would be "operational monographs, theater and campaign histories, administrative histories, a general popular history, an official history, and published documents." No mean task, certainly.

And just as certainly the fire and drama of the war could be captured—if at all—only in those operational monographs and campaign histories. But there were of course the pedestrian accounts of administrative doings, important in their way, and for the purposes of this memoir we must trace the development of activity concerned with recording the deeds of Fort Shafter headquarters.

On August 5, 1944—a year after the organization of the Historical Branch—Headquarters, United States Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Area, activated the First Information and Historical Service. This outfit, functioning under G-2 (Intelligence), was charged with planning and scheduling projects. Although its primary job was to collect, prepare and forward information about combat operations, it received—in December, 1955—the additional chore of making up a tentative outline for the theater history.

This was ready by the middle of January, 1945; the suggested 21 chapters were such that they could be assigned to different men, who would be working on them simultaneously. Major Hugh M. Lytle, commanding the 1st I & H, transmitted to headquarters the estimated time necessary: a total of 76 man-months. Another idea expressed at the same time was the need for close liaison with the Navy, since researchers would demand access to classified records of both services. During this period the I & H staff were formulating a tentative chronology of the theater history; they also worked on a general descriptive survey of records held at Headquarters, USAFPOA. But on January 20, 1945, the 1st I & H was attached to the Tenth Army and moved to Schofield Barracks. Work on the theater history practically stopped.

Already, late in 1944, the G-2 of USAFPOA at Fort Shafter "had started negotiations with the Historical Branch in Washington to have a qualified military historian assigned to take over direction of the historical element in the 1st Information and Historical Service, destined for assignment as a unit to Tenth Army." This action brought Lt. Col. Frederick P. Todd to Hawaii on February 11, 1945. Todd had been transferred from the Noumea, New Caledonia headquarters of United States Army Forces in the South Pacific Area (USAFISPA). At Noumea he had planned and supervised research and writing of their headquarters history.

Soon after Lt. Col. Todd arrived, a Historical Subsection, G-2, USAFPOA, was set up. Its assigned tasks included working up the theater history. Helping Todd in the early weeks was Lt. Col. Jesse S. Douglas, Liaison and Policy Officer for the War Department Historical Branch. He arrived 9 days after Todd and stayed on Oahu until April 10, 1945. During this period, personnel and equipment were being assembled; about the only work directly bearing on the theater history was the continuing examination and description of HUSAFPOA records.

All of this information comes from the completed narrative now filed with the Office of the Chief of Military History. The present writer's advent is chronicled thus: "An increase of personnel, including three officers trained in the Historical Branch, G-2 who reported for duty late in April, made possible more direct and specific research and writing on the history of the Theater as such." I was one of the "increase", and an enlisted man to boot—the ultimate in anonymity. Late in 1944 the word had filtered down that volunteers were being rounded up for something called "combat historian". My remembrance is that the twin qualifications were: (1) rank of private first class; (2) a master's degree in history. This meant sacrificing a stripe, but the loss was easy to arrange.

So, late in February, 1945, Pfc Greer found himself at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, with three others similarly committed. Here the deal changed. We were to split up into a new kind of outfit—3-man combat photo teams (captain, lieutenant, and sergeant)—supplied with jeep, trailer, loads of equipment, and a regimental set of Army regulations. The sergeant, naturally, was the one who had to make out the morning report, keep those regulations up to date, wash the jeep, etc. But this bubble burst; somewhere up the line it was decided: no combat photo teams. There we were, flotsam and jetsam. Our leader, Capt. Battle, disappeared. We had hoped to see him promoted to major. Henceforth our orders came from a sleek, rotund young man, one Capt. Concannon, whom we promptly dubbed Cannonfodder, without any particular malice.

After a short time in limbo, we four got the word to report to Ft. Lewis, Washington, for embarkation overseas. It looked as though we might be combat historians after all. A train took us from San Antonio to Seattle. Our stay there was brief.

We had made the train trip unescorted; still without anyone directly in charge of us, we boarded a transport. My service record shows that I left the mainland one day and arrived in Hawaii the next. Actually it was a 12-day grind, 6 of them spent on a stormy sea. How stormy? One morning at breakfast we were choking down some victuals, eating standing up, as always. The table, about waist-high, had a raised rim around it. Suddenly the bucking ship rolled with apparent intent to capsize. Everything and everybody landed on the floor. One unfortunate sat down at table's end; a gallon tin of preserves slid away, hit the rim, and somersaulted upside down onto the lad's head, which took on the look of a giant, improbable sundae. The rest of us were wallowing in a slush of coffee, scrambled eggs, and shattered toast. The mess attendant, viewing this particular mess, radiated rage and frustration. He shrieked: "What's the matter with you? \*!! guys? Would you act like that in your own homes?"

There were persistent rumors that the groaning ship had cracked, or was expected to crack, or something such. But on the morning of that twelfth day we took salt-water showers, put on khakis, and stood on deck in a downpour while the p.a. system blared "Blue Hawaii". It was April 1, 1945.

Later, packed into open trucks, we slogged along Dillingham Blvd. and out to an installation called the Thirteenth Replacement Depot. It was on the far side of Wahiawa, which separated it from Schofield Barracks, as I remember.

The rain persisted. The "Reppel Deppel", as it was known, was not a place to inspire nostalgia. Whoever had laid out our area arranged it so that runoff drained into and through the theater. Much time was spent in contriving networks of ditches to remedy this blunder. Other diversions were pulling weeds around the training area to make it look as though it was being used (it wasn't), and loading ships.

When I write, "much time was spent", I mean that we were stuck again—lost. Afterward we found out that our records and orders had been diverted to Ft. Ruger. But at the time we sweated it out day by day, with frequent trips to the company office, trying to get information. Our Reppel Deppel experience lasted some three weeks, perhaps. I have a vague recollection of learning about President Roosevelt's death there.

Anyhow, one afternoon I was called to the phone; it was then that I heard Lt. Col. Todd's voice for the first time. It said, in effect: "We need your group here at Ft. Shafter. Don't budge. If anybody tries to move you out, tell him to call me first." The next day we were sitting on the porch of the old enlisted men's barracks at Shafter, looking out across Palm Circle. We were in the first building to the right of the gate (it and the other barracks are all offices now). Directly across the road from the gate was old Tripler General Hospital.

Our Historical Subsection now consisted of our 4-man team, plus perhaps one or two others at this early stage, Col. Todd, and the three officers mentioned before. Our first duty station was in the "Pineapple Pentagon"—now Richardson Hall. Here Col. Todd gave us some lectures on historiography. He was an impressive man—noble profile, iron-gray mustache, dignified but courteous deportment. Both before and after the Shafter interlude he had a distinguished career as a military historian, retiring at the end of his service as Director of the Military Museum at West Point.

But our Pineapple Pentagon days were few; almost immediately we moved into a big ground-floor bull pen at the back of what is now Bldg. T13. My first real job here was a warm-up study of supply activities supporting the occupation of Baker Island. Its purpose: to see if I had what it took to make a historian.

Our pace was slow during these weeks. A personnel shuffle was in the works. Lt. Col. Douglas had left Shafter in April; on June 2 he returned. Conferences and actions that followed had these results: (1) Historical Subsection people were all transferred from the 1st I & H to G-2, HUSAFPOA; (2) a Subsection allotment of 5 officers and 4 enlisted men was set up; (3) Todd returned to his permanent organization (he left for Okinawa on June 18) and the late Maj. (later Lt. Col.) John Stevens, formerly a Philadelphia lawyer, replaced him in command of the Subsection. Stevens arrived on July 31 to relieve Capt. (later Major) Nelson Drummond of his temporary command; (4) 6 officers and 3 enlisted men from the 1st I & H were brought in to work on various assignments: the Okinawa operation, the Palau operations, the XXIV Corps

and Saipan accounts, and administrative histories. The Historical Subsection itself, which hosted these men, had as its mission the history of the Hawaiian Department, USAFICPA, and USAFPOA.

With everyone thus accounted for, I can catch up on certain miscellany. By this time I was the only one of our original four enlisted men left at the Shafter historical works. One had gone to the Army newspaper, one to public relations, and one—at his own repeated loud insistence—to Okinawa. By the time he got there the action was over, and he started an equally insistent, but futile, push to go in the opposite direction.

We enlisted men at the Historical Subsection had been put into the Army's Detached Enlisted Men's List (DEML). We called it "demilitarized". And it was an easy enough life. A headquarters company housekeeping platoon swept the floors and washed the dishes; all we had to do was to report to the job à la civilian. Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and all day Sunday, were ours to enjoy.

And enjoy them we did. Along the front of our bull pen—shared with the military translation section—ran a low railing. This was the drying rack for swimshorts and even more intimate wear—until the day when a surprise inspection resulted in an order to CLEAR THAT RAIL.

Outside our quarters was an underground vault which we proposed to use for storing classified records. But rats had left proof of their presence. So I typed out an order for rat traps. Many weeks later a thick batch of paper, with endorsements from as far away as the West Coast, landed in my basket. No traps anywhere. Meanwhile we had moved to another location, the present Bldg. T28, behind T13 and next to the golf course.

Before the transfer, one night found me in our bull pen doing some personal correspondence when a technical sergeant in the translation outfit wandered in and sat down at his desk. I thought nothing of it until I heard a noise behind me. Startled, I looked around. The sergeant had broken open the screen and was climbing out into the shrubbery. Strange! Next morning we got the word: He had cracked up completely.

The official history of our history continues:

One [of the 3 officers assigned late in April] worked from 1 May to the end of August on the section treating Naval and joint command, completing treatment of basic principles and command relationships, and starting a section on joint command in practice. An enlisted man [myself] working with this officer did research and writing concerning various phases of joint logistical planning, including exhaustive documentary survey of the base logistical plan, its implementation, the formation of the joint staff and subsequent administrative developments, establishment of supply policy for advanced bases, and planning derived from this policy.

The monster report my industry eventually generated ran to some 950 manuscript pages, if I remember correctly.

Here we must take up again the thread of continuing activity. We had been chuffing along for something more than 3 months when Maj. Stevens entered the scene. Following his advent, certain changes were made in the Theater History outline. The new dispensation included: (1) an introduction; (2) the

original plan for the narrative, substantially unchanged; (3) an entirely new section on Theater operations; (4) a breakdown of the section on joint command, and (5) extensive changes in certain subject divisions—logistics, civil affairs, and bases and forward areas. Meanwhile 3 officers sent from the Historical Branch in Washington joined the Subsection. And HUSAFPOA general and staff sections had been directed to draw up full historical accounts.

During most of this time the Theater History had been in various stages of planning and re-planning. But the day came at last when we all sat around a table and cut the pie: You will take this chapter; you will take that. In this deal officers and enlisted men, regardless of rank, fared much the same. As we know, I drew joint logistical operations of the Army and Navy; I occupied my cubicle and set to work. The others did the same. Out front were the typists to whom we fed our products. We plowed along steadily.

It was not a typical outfit. We were all college graduates, cooperating on a scholarly enterprise. Consequently, there was little "G.I." about the office. Once in a while we took outings together; sometimes to the beach, where Col. Stevens liked to hum themes from Brahms symphonies for us to identify, sometimes to a chop suey house. One of my most persistent memories centers on an evening at Me P. Y. Chong's, then occupying a run-down, 3-story Victorian mansion at the Waikiki end of the Ala Moana bridge, makai side. Rumor said it had once been a bawdy house. Many a kamaaina will recall the effervescent Chong and his various restaurants during a long career of shifting fortunes. On this particular night the big dish of chop suey came past; perching on top was a thoroughly boiled roach. The dish passed by. I said nothing. I still wonder who got the prize.

On the job things went well enough. It was mostly a matter of laying documents end to end, with enough transition to glue them together—the whole giving the effect of one of those early operas in which stylized recitatives haul the listener along between arias. Where sources failed I tried to manufacture them with letters to those involved, or to their successors. I still remember an especially frustrating incident: I read a reference to a paper that promised to cover an important gap, hurried to the files, and found a little note: "In the desk of Col. so and so." Where was the colonel? Transferred out over a year earlier.

But the unforgettable Lt. Larry . . . . . was ever with us. He was an excellent young man, a journalist miscast in the role of historian, laboring under the agonizing necessity to come up with footnotes and such. Basically, his trouble was that he wanted to make his dull administrative tale read like the assault on some Pacific stronghold. Fortunately, his humor never failed completely: He continued in his darkest days to hum "O'Brien Was Tryin' to Learn to Speak Hawaiian in His Own Peculiar Way." Poor fellow, his Gethsemane dragged on and on; he was still at it when I left Shafter.

Early plans to coordinate our efforts with those of the Navy were not idle vagaries, though often in the course of my work, reading acrimonious letters and memos, I wondered if the Army and Navy concentrated their most telling fire on the enemy or on each other. My counterpart, on the third floor of



Makalapa headquarters, was one Lt. James, a serious-minded and industrious youth. I always tried to time my visits with him to coincide at some point with lunch, being firmly convinced of the superior merits of Navy chow. One day I walked into the ground floor to find a detail of sailors crating up stacks of records. Back to Washington with them. So I vaulted upstairs to congratulate James on the completion of his work. "COMPLETION OF MY WORK?!" he screamed on his way to the phone. The records were uncrated.

The weeks and months flew by. We lived them out in our various ways: some in single-minded contemplation of home, some in the spangled sunshine and shadow of brief romances, a few in endless dissipation. Then it was September 2, 1945, the Great Day. Our history of histories continues dryly:

The strength and duty assignments in the Subsection at close of the war were as follows: The Chief of Section and Theater Historian [Stevens] was co-writer, with one enlisted historian, of the account of the Okinawa operation. One officer was completing the account of the Palau operations; another was generally responsible for the research and writing for the sections of the Theater History concerned with manpower, morale, and training. A third was assigned to prepare the introduction and the section on operations. A fourth is assembling biographical data concerning the chief figures in the History. A fifth was completing the study of classified messages exchanged with the War Department. A sixth was acting as liaison agent with the Staff Section historians. A seventh was responsible for the administrative work of the Subsection. One enlisted historian [myself] continued the work on the general problem of logistics; another devoted approximately half time to research concerning training, half to administrative activities. These, with the addition of a cartographer, an enlisted man who handled staff research questions and assisted certain of the historians, two enlisted clerks and four civilian typists, completed the personnel. One officer of the 1st I & H on detached service with the Subsection for the purpose of completing the Leyte narrative was under orders transferring him to Washington.

The war was over, but the history was not. I plodded on steadily until February, 1946, rolling up the hundreds of pages which the completed account refers to as the "Greer manuscript".

This was during the hectic homeward rush. Enlisted men held "get us out of here" rallies on Palm Circle; departing troops choked the tent city at Fort Kamehameha and boarded everything that flew back through Hawaii from the forward areas. I was in no particular hurry to go, but the day came when even joint logistics digested all of its fodder, and for me it was back to the West Coast in a bucket seat.

By this time I was a T3 (in those days No. 1 was at the top, master or first sergeant). But I had been "passed over" once: One day Lt. Col. Stevens called me and a man named Morgan into his office. He had one opening for T3, and he didn't want to choose between us. Would we agree to flip a coin for it? We would. Morgan won. But another opening came up soon.

As the HUSAFMIDPAC history entered its final phase, there was an attempt to distill the experience gained into lessons for the future:

Though the problem of giving [an] adequate historical report of the work of the Army in this Theater had been more or less generally recognized for some time, actual attention to [this project] throughout the Headquarters began only as the war ended. In the case of some activities and agencies, where systematic records and reports had been

maintained, [there] was not too serious a delay. In other cases the preparation of a full and accurate account [presented] major difficulties. The most obvious implication . . . is that certainly in peace and probably in war a major headquarters should establish and maintain a historical program with professionally trained personnel. Such a program should certainly provide for access to and direction of necessary records of the organization and work of the headquarters. An example of a procedure invaluable in the insurance of adequate later historical coverage was the recently instituted 'Actions and Decisions of the Commanding General and the Chief of Staff', prepared daily in this Headquarters. [Experience indicates] that an adequate and continuing historical agency must have both responsibility and authority to plan and direct the collection of essential records in such fashion that they will be workable for the purposes of historical writing.

My last view of our operation came in August, 1946. I had gone back to Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas for discharge. Then an unexpected job offer brought me again to Hawaii. On a hot summer day I visited the old office in Bldg. T28. Many familiar faces had disappeared, but the remaining few carried on, applying the finishing touches. The "Greer manuscript" was being condensed via dictaphone by a former colleague. Other terminal activities proceeded. I can't say when the end came; I never returned to find out.

Twenty-two years passed. One April afternoon in 1968 found me talking to Mr. Robert R. Smith of the Military History Branch, Operations Division, G-3 at Fort Shafter. He and his staff occupied what had been our enlisted men's latrine behind the old barracks on Palm Circle. Smith had written the account of the Palau Islands campaign; we chatted, recalling old mutual acquaintances. Afterward I went to the shelves where the HUSAFMIDPAC history stood—15 volumes of carbon-copy typescript bound in crumbling manila paper. Beside it was a fragmentary set of staff section histories:

The Army in the Pacific Ocean Areas  
History of  
United States Army Forces  
Middle Pacific  
and  
Predecessor Commands  
During World War II  
7 December 1941—2 September 1945  
Prepared by  
Historical Subsection, G-2  
USAFMIDPAC

The introduction sketched broad outlines: On July 1, 1943, the old Hawaiian Department became United States Army Forces in the Central Pacific Area under Lt. Gen. Robert C. Richardson, Jr., and the Army's defensive role shifted to one of participation in the great westward sweep toward the Japanese homeland. At the same time, the complex functions of military government and relations with Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas (Admiral Chester W. Nimitz), continued, as did the "devitalizing



friction" that ran through all echelons of joint Army-Navy efforts. A year later—in July, 1944—Army headquarters at Shafter were re-designated United States Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Area, and the command was enlarged to include, nearly, the stretches from the Aleutians to New Zealand, and from offshore United States to the hypothetical boundaries of Japan and the China coast. But again, on August 1, 1945, another change occurred; this was the creation of United States Army Forces, Middle Pacific, and with this diminished stature the headquarters ended the war.

The three main elements of the Fort Shafter responsibility were combat operations, administrative and logistical activities, and the often-difficult Army-Navy joint relations. These relations, likewise, had three phases: (1) the pre-war principle of "cooperation", (2) increasing joint effort under unity of command during the war, and (3) the return to joint command (MacArthur and Nimitz) in the final stage of hostilities.

The massive account compiled by the Historical Subsection concentrated, quite naturally, on the administrative aspect: training, logistics, and the administration of manpower, and these last two topics provided the history's longest sections.

The subjects covered fall into fairly well-defined parts:

#### OPERATIONS

- Pacific Ocean Area as a Theater of War
- The Japanese Attack and First Months of War
- The Early Offensive—Marshalls and Marianas
- USAFPOA Formed—the Offensive Continues
- Final Effort and Victory

#### THE COMMAND

- Development of the Hawaiian Department
- Development of Organizations for Command in the Central Pacific Area
- Development of Organizations for Command in the Pacific Ocean Areas
- Reorganization into AFMIDPAC

#### BASES

- Command Structure, Central Pacific Bases
- Ferry Route Bases
- Early Stepping Stones to Japan
- Base Commands
- Bases for Final Offensive
- Roll-up of Bases

#### JOINT ACTION

- Development of Joint Action
- Joint Action Evolved in Practice
- Joint Action in Logistics
- Joint Action in Communications

## LOGISTICAL DEVELOPMENT

Logistical Development from Outbreak of War to Creation of USAFICPA

Logistical Development from Creation of USAFICPA to Creation of USAFPOA

Logistical Development from Establishment of USAFPOA to End of War

## TRAINING

General Development of Training

Amphibious Training

Jungle Training

Special Schools

Operational Research

## MILITARY PERSONNEL

Personnel

Administration of Military Justice

Health

Morale and Recreation

## MILITARY GOVERNMENT

Situation Prior to Pearl Harbor

Establishment of Military Government

Security Regulations Affecting Private Activities

Security Regulations Affecting Public Activities

Security Regulations Affecting Enemy Aliens and Dual Citizens

Conservation and Control of Materials and Supplies

Conservation and Control of Manpower

Conservation and Utilization of Transportation Facilities

Administration of Justice under Military Government

Problems of Jurisdiction and Gradual Lessening of Military Control

As we thumbed through the history everybody else saw, I am sure, just another decaying space-filler. But behind the shabby row I glimpsed the ghosts of 1945-1946—laughing, chaffing, working and living in the heady days of approaching victory. Some have died; others have suffered irreversible personal tragedy; a few have won a certain measure of distinction. And even the clear and shining victory itself has been obscured by the clouds of later years. Only the history remains the same, up there on its shelf.